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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS

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SUBJECT: Peace Process Update: Reports of ceasefire violations spike down; One-year milestone for process

Refs: Colombo 2337, and previous (Notal)

(U) Classified by W. Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) This update of Sri Lanka's peace process reviews the following:

- Reports of ceasefire violations spike way down
- Criticism of government and Norwegians over import of radio equipment for LTTE continues to flare
- GSL-LTTE meeting in London canceled, but January talks in Bangkok still on
- Although tension in party does not abate, Muslim leader Rauf Hakeem seems back on top -- for now
- The Flavor of the Peace Process: December 24 marks one-year milestone

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Reported Violations Spike Down  
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2. (U) The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) has announced that reported violations of the February ceasefire accord have spiked way down. The Norwegian-run SLMM stated that there had been a total of 146 reports in November of which 33 were against the Sri Lankan government and 113 against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The November total compares with the average of about 300-400 alleged violations reported to the SLMM during each of the previous months. Of the 113 reported violations attributed to the LTTE, the SLMM announced that 38 involved the forcible recruitment of children for the Tigers' armed forces. The SLMM continued to investigate these reports, as well as a number of others involving the LTTE. In terms of the 33 reports involving the GSL, the SLMM had investigated them and determined that none were violations.

3. (SBU) ((Note: An important ceasefire-related issue under in-depth discussion between the two sides lately involves the GSL military's "high security zones" in the north/east, and their impact on the local populace. Late last week, the GSL handed over a proposal regarding high security zone adjustments to the SLMM. This proposal is being provided to the LTTE for review.)))

4. (C) COMMENT: The latest news re reported violations is a positive development. At this point, both sides seem to be honoring the ceasefire accord more than at any point since it was signed in February. The bad news is that the LTTE still appears to be involved in the forcible recruitment of children. UNICEF is working with the LTTE on this issue and reports that the group is being cooperative, but that much progress needs to be made. END COMMENT.

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Critics Lash Out over Equipment for LTTE  
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5. (SBU) Critics continue to lash out at the GSL and the Norwegian facilitators over the recent import of radio equipment for the LTTE. (Note: At the government's request, the Norwegian Embassy imported LTTE-purchased radio equipment in a diplomatic consignment. After the equipment was handed over to the GSL, the equipment was sent to the LTTE's "Voice of the Tigers" radio station -- See Reftel.) In a December 20 press briefing, a People's Alliance (PA) spokesman accused the GSL of "treason," asserting that the government should not have allowed the equipment to be brought in the country. In addition, spokesmen for the radical Jananatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) party have denounced the Norwegian role, claiming that the GoN had

abused its diplomatic status by allowing the equipment to be brought in duty free. The JVP is planning to hold a demonstration in front of the Norwegian Embassy late December 23.

16. (C) COMMENT: This issue does not seem to be dying. While emanating from the usual anti-peace process sources, the attacks on the Norwegians are getting increasingly vitriolic. In particular, Norwegian Ambassador Jon Westborg has taken some harsh hits, with many of the attacks taking personal aim at him. Despite the fact that it asked the GoN to become involved in the first place, the government has not rushed in to defend the Norwegians, as of yet. Addressing this point, Tomas Stangeland, poloff at the Norwegian Embassy, told us today that he thought the government would issue a statement clarifying the matter soon. He noted that it was difficult for the GoN to say anything in its defense until the GSL explained its key role in public. END COMMENT.

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Meeting in London Canceled  
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17. (C) A meeting between G.L. Peiris, a senior government minister, and Anton Balasingham, the chief negotiator for the LTTE, was canceled last week. The meeting was supposed to take place in London on December 18, but Balasingham canceled at the last minute for "health" reasons. Tomas Stangeland of the Norwegian Embassy told us it was indeed possible that Balasingham was ill. (Note: Balasingham has had very serious health problems for years.) According to Stangeland, however, it also seemed a real possibility that Balasingham was upset with a recent letter from the Japanese government to the LTTE reviewing how the GoJ disburses development assistance. Stangeland said the GoJ letter apparently made it clear that funding had to go to the GSL first -- and only then out to projects in LTTE-controlled areas. (Note: The LTTE believes that it should control the funding to the full extent possible.)

18. (C) COMMENT: The cancellation of the London meeting was unfortunate -- Stangeland said the meeting would have been useful in mapping out next steps in the peace process. That said, despite continued discussion about the nature of aid disbursements, the fourth session of GSL-LTTE talks slated to take place in Thailand from January 6-9 still seems to be on track. END COMMENT.

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Hakeem Seems Back on Top -- For Now  
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19. (C) The saga involving splits in the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) shows little sign of abating soon. Both party leader (and GSL minister) Rauf Hakeem and his SLMC opponents continue to hit out at each other in almost daily attacks. Hakeem insists that he has suspended the rebels from party activities and he is threatening to expel them altogether if they do not toe the line. In the meantime, the rebels assert that Hakeem has been removed as leader and expelled from the party. Of late, Hakeem appears to be gaining the edge in the fight. On December 13, he won a court case, which turned down a demand from the rebels that he be enjoined from acting as party leader. In addition, Hakeem seems to be having some success on the stump in uniting the rest of the SLMC against the rebels. While the two sides remain at loggerheads, various efforts are under way to mediate the conflict.

110. (C) COMMENT: Hakeem has led an effective legal and political counterattack against his SLMC opponents, so far. He seems animated and less aloof, which has helped him as he fights for his political life. His grip on power still seems fragile, however, and it is not clear how long he can keep the initiative. Given the nasty, internecine struggle, it is also not clear whether Hakeem will be present at the fourth session of GSL-LTTE talks. (Note: Hakeem was present throughout the first two rounds as a member of the government's team, but had to leave suddenly in the middle of the third session in early December because of his political troubles back home.) END COMMENT.

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One-Year Milestone  
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111. (U) The peace process is about to celebrate its one-year anniversary. December 24 will mark one-year since the start of the process. (Note: At midnight on December 24, 2001, both sides joined in unilateral,

ceasefires renewable on a month-by-month basis. In February 2002, both sides reached agreement on the ceasefire accord now in place.) With much of the country effectively shutting down for the holiday season, few festivities marking the one-year anniversary of the process are planned, although some churches are planning to ring their bells in a salute to the occasion. Neither the government, the LTTE nor the Norwegian facilitators are planning any official programs.

¶12. (SBU) COMMENT: Thanks to the peace process, there have not been any major incidents of violence in Sri Lanka in the past year. This is quite a remarkable achievement, given the fact that in previous years over 66,000 thousand people were killed on the battlefield or in LTTE-sponsored terrorist attacks. This iteration of the peace process is already the longest break in violence the country has experienced by far since the conflict began in 1983. (Note: The longest cessation of hostilities before the current process was in 1994-95 and lasted about six months. Breaks in the fighting in 1987, 1990, and 2000-01 each lasted only a handful of months.) END COMMENT.

¶13. (U) Minimize considered.

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